Toward representative bureaucracy:

Predicting public service attraction among underrepresented groups in Canada

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A pressing challenge for public sector employers is the issue of how to compete with the private sector in attracting top talent to their organizations. In Canada, this issue is particularly prominent in light of a tightening labor market and a looming skill shortage stemming from factors such as a low birth rate and increased retirement among older workers, i.e. “baby boomers” (Burke & Ng, 2006; Globe and Mail, 2012). As a result of this pronounced skill shortage, the Canadian federal government has adopted a more aggressive immigration policy targeting highly skilled and educated workers from all over the world (Canadian Labour and Business Centre, n.d.). Historically, immigrants have come primarily from Europe, but Asia Pacific and the Middle East have surpassed Europe as the principal source of immigrants to Canada over the past 30 years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). In light of this influx of immigrants from a wide spectrum of countries, the Canadian population and its workforce are becoming increasingly ethnoculturally diverse. Despite these rising levels of diversity in Canadian population, however, visible minorities[[1]](#footnote-1) and other demographic groups (e.g., Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, sexual minorities or LGBT individuals, and women) remain significantly underrepresented at various levels in the public sector (Employment Equity Act: Annual Report, 2010).

In this research, we aim to address the question of what factors may contribute to minority group members’ attraction (or lack of attraction) to public sector employment. Specifically, we examine whether individuals from different demographic groups may vary in their attraction to public sector vs. private sector employment and their core work values associated with this sectoral preference. Public administration scholars have argued that individuals may seek employment in the public service for a number of reasons, including the type of work (e.g., interest in policy-making/implementation), a feeling of patriotism or self-sacrifice for one’s country, and potentially greater recognition and appreciation for issues of social justice in the public sector (e.g., Perry & Wise, 1990). However, very little research has examined sectoral preferences of minority group members as well as the specific work values underlying these preferences. Thus, in this paper, we examine three primary research questions. First, are minority group members (i.e., women, visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, LGBT) more or less likely to desire public sector over private sector careers? Second, what are the key work values that predict attraction to public sector employment? Third, how do minority group members compare to the majority group with respect to their preferences for the core work values that predict public service attraction? Answers to these questions will advance our understanding of the prevalence of public service attraction, and the motives underlying attraction to public sector employment among the underrepresented groups. This knowledge can, in turn, assist public sector policy-makers and managers in designing and implementing policies and practices that enhance diversity in the public sector.

It is critically important that the public sector is comprised of a diverse workforce for a number of reasons: First, as mentioned, increasing globalization and immigration is expected to continue to result in greater ethnocultural diversity in the Canadian workforce in the coming years (Burke & Ng, 2006). Likewise, the influx of women in the labor market, the presence of a sizeable and growing Aboriginal population, a greater awareness of differently abled persons, as well as the number of LGBT individuals coming out in the workplace, will also contribute to protracted levels of diversity in the workforce. From this standpoint, increasing levels of diversity are inevitable and the public sector will need to respond to these shifting demographics to reflect the diverse, multicultural nature of Canadian society. Second, it is important to build and maintain a diverse public service due to inherent “value-in-diversity.” Research conducted in private sector organizations has reported that workforce diversity, when properly managed, results in increased attraction of top talent to an organization (Ng & Burke, 2005), better problem solving, and greater creativity and innovation (Cox & Blake, 1991). Although comparatively little research on the benefits of diversity has been conducted in the public sector, similar advantages should accrue to public sector organizations (Pitts & Wise, 2010). Finally and perhaps most importantly, it is imperative that the public service achieves a representative bureaucracy. Having a public service that mirrors the growing diversity among Canadians is crucial to ensuring that policy setting and implementation are consistent with the interests of each growing segment of the population (Rich, 1975; Ogmundson, 2005). Achieving a more representative bureaucracy would also reaffirm Canada’s commitment to its multiculturalism policy which requires the government to be sensitive and responsive to the multicultural realities of Canada (cf. Haq & Ng, 2010).

Representative Bureaucracy

Despite the changing demographic landscape in Canada, very little has been written on the topic of representative bureaucracy in the Canadian public sector (Agocs, 2012). Much of the existing literature on representative bureaucracy has focused on linguistic representation pertaining to the French language, which ties in to issues of national unity (e.g., Kernaghan, 1978; Rich, 1975; Wilson & Mullins, 1978). In a seminal article outlining the principles of representative bureaucracy, Kingsley (1944, cf. Rich, 1976) critiqued the administrative class in Britain as acting primarily in the interests of the “upper middle class” and neglecting the interests of society-at-large, largely because the British bureaucracy did not adequately reflect the socio-economic and demographic composition of British society. Thus, a key premise underlying the notion or representative bureaucracy is that a lack of fair representation in public sector institutions can result in the denial of opportunities and inequitable treatment for those who are not members of the dominant group. Mosher (1982) later refined the theory of representative bureaucracy, identifying two key components: ‘active’ representation and ‘passive’ representation. *Passive* representation occurs when bureaucrats mirror the demographic profile of the citizens they serve. This can in turn, lead to *active* representation, which exists when bureaucrats in fact formulate policies that directly benefit the diverse groups that they represent. While studies on the direct and indirect outcomes of representative bureaucracy across gender, race, and sexual orientation are much more established in the US (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011; Roch, Pitts, & Navarro, 2010; Thielemann & Stewart 1996), there has been some initial work examining the effects of representative bureaucracy in other countries (Miller, 2012; Ncholo, 2000). In Canada, Ogmundson (2005) reviewed the effects of representative bureaucracy and how the presence of women in government can lead to a greater concern for women’s issues (e.g., jobs, child support, domestic abuse) and even the appointment of women to higher-level positions (e.g., as female judges). Similarly, Bouchard and Carroll (2002) argue that visible minorities may accrue several benefits (e.g., changes in immigration admissions) when there is a stronger presence of visible minorities in the government. Representative bureaucracy is particularly important for Canada, since it is the first country in the world to espouse an official multiculturalism policy. The Multiculturalism Act, passed in 1988, is a policy of inclusion and a means by which the federal government reaffirms multiculturalism as a fundamental value of Canadian society and of the Government of Canada. As such, all federal institutions must take multiculturalism into account in all their activities, and is held accountable for ensuring that they ‘carry on their activities in a manner that is sensitive and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canada’ (cf. Haq & Ng, 2010). Consistent with this objective, the Canadian government has put in place an employment equity policy aimed at ensuring that its public service is representative of the Canadian population (Agocs, 2012; Winn 1985).

**Table 1: Employment Equity in Canada: Representation of Underrepresented**

**Groups (Source: Employment Equity Act: Annual Report 2010)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Aboriginal Peoples* | *Persons with disabilities* | *Visible*  *Minorities* | *Women* |
| Public Sector | 3.9% | 4.2% | 8.7% | 43.0% |
| Private Sector\* | 1.9% | 2.7% | 17.1% | 42.3% |
| Labor Market Availability | 3.1% | 4.7% | 14.5% | 48.6% |

\* Federally-regulated private sector

Although employment equity has been in place since 1986, the policy as an instrument for ensuring representative bureaucracy has fallen short of meeting its objective. Three of the four designated groups that historically face discrimination in the workplace remain underrepresented (i.e., persons with disabilities, visible minorities, and women) relative to their representation in the Canadian workforce (see Table 1). While overall representation rates for Aboriginal peoples approximate those of the Canadian population, a more detailed analysis suggests that Aboriginal people are often “ghettoized” in positions in the lowest levels of the government (Agocs, 2012). Although the Canadian government is actively recruiting members of minority groups to close the representation gaps (Benhamadi, 2003; Public Service Commission of Canada, 2011), it remains unclear if minority group members are attracted to employment in the public service or may be more attracted to employment in the private sector where employers are also aggressively competing for top talent and aiming to broaden the diversity of their workforce[[2]](#footnote-2). Thus, a compelling case can be made to investigate individuals’ motives behind joining the public service, particularly among minority group members.

Public Sector Attraction and Motivation

In recent years, a number of public administration scholars have studied the concepts of public sector or public service attraction, including what is sometimes labelled “public service motivation.” Perry and Wise (1990) first theorized that individuals may be drawn to public service as a function of rational (self-interests), normative (social justice), and affective (sacrifice for the country) reasons. Subsequent research has refined this initial conceptualization, identifying four factors that explain attraction to the public service including attraction to public policy-making, commitment to public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice (Kim, 2009; 2011; Perry, 1996). Based on these conceptualizations, several studies have examined the antecedents, outcomes, and organizational processes associated with public sector attraction in the US. (cf. Carpenter, Dovedrspike, & Miguel, 2012; Kim & Vandenabeele, 2010), as well as in a select few other countries (Houston, 2011; Kim et al., 2013; Vandenabeele, 2007).

Although a strong research foundation has been established in this domain, the literature on public service attraction and motivation has largely focused on the intrinsic aspects of public service, while perhaps ignoring other aspects of work. For example, studies in the research literature on work careers suggest that individuals experience work as either a *job,* a *career,* or a *calling* (cf. Wrzesniewski, 2002). Individuals who view their work as a *job* primarily seek out monetary benefits (i.e., an income); those who view their work as a *career* seek out advancement, status, power, and prestige in addition to monetary benefits; finally, those who consider their work a *calling* seek out personal fulfillment from their jobs rather than monetary benefits and/or career advancement. Given the strong altruistic and pro-social component underlying conventional conceptualizations and measures of public service motivation (Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010; Vandenabeele, 2008), the literature on public service motivation has largely assessed individuals’ attraction to the public service as a *calling* (“government calling”). However, it is important to note that research on career choice in the public sector has also recently emphasized conceptualizing public sector employment from the perspective of “jobs” or “careers,” highlighting the importance of specific extrinsic rewards for workers such as better pay, benefits, and job security (Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007; Clark & Postel-Vinay, 2009; Houston, 2000).

Although a great deal is known about individuals who are employed in the public sector (Bright, 2005; Lewis & Frank, 2002; Vandenabeele, 2011), comparatively little is known about those who are about to embark on their careers and the factors that contribute to their attraction to employment in the public vs. private sector (Perry & Buckwalter, 2010). Given changing demographics and the entry of a large cadre of younger works (“millenials”) into the workforce to replace retiring baby boomers (Lyons, Ng, & Schweitzer, 2012), a key challenge for the federal government and other public sector employers will be to successfully recruit younger workers to the public sector. Several studies suggest that younger workers (“millenials”) tend to espouse values, attitudes, and expectations that differ from those of previous generations (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2010; Lyons et al., 2012). For example, younger workers tend to have generally more negative views of the government and government jobs (Chetkovich, 2003; Lewis & Frank, 2002), for instance, viewing government jobs as “less fun” (Karl, Peluchette, Hall, & Harland, 2005). Younger workers today are also seeking less supervision (Jurkiewicz, 2000), and emphasize job attributes such as salary levels (Taylor, 2005a) more than previous generations. In this regard, the core values of the workforce are shifting, requiring different recruitment strategies than the past (Lewis & Cho, 2011). In a similar vein, minority groups may differ in their views of the attractiveness of government jobs as a function of varying emphases on certain job attributes. For example, ethnic minorities may view the federal government as quite progressive in certain domains (e.g., enforcing anti-discrimination legislation), but less progressive in other areas (e.g., offering lower salaries, Lewis & Frank, 2002; providing fewer promotional opportunities, Beck, Reitz, & Werner, 2002) which may, in turn, influence their preference for public vs. private sector employment.

Drawing on person-organization fit theory, we propose that individuals’ work values will be instrumental in determining an individual’s attraction to the public sector. Chatman (1989) defined P-O fit as the “congruence between organizational values and individual values.” Applied to career choice decisions, if an individual sees a fit between an individual’s work values and the values supported by the public sector, the individual will be more attracted to employment in public sector organizations. Consistent with this perspective, research has reported that P-O fit mediates the relationship between public service motivation and employee work attitudes (Wright & Pandey, 2008; Kim 2012), thereby underlining the importance of P-O fit in predicting career outcomes. The present study contributes to extant literature on representative bureaucracy and career choice in the public service in three ways. First, we examine differences in public service attraction among five demographic groups that are underrepresented in the public sector. The minority groups investigated in this study include the four designated groups (i.e., Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, visible minorities, and women) formally recognized under the federal Employment Equity Act (EEA) as having historically faced discrimination in the workplace (Haq & Ng, 2010). Moreover, we are also examining the career preferences of sexual minorities (LGBT people), an understudied minority group who were not part of the original EEA but were subsequently protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights in 1995[[3]](#footnote-3). It is important to study underrepresented groups because they are an emerging segment of the population and they also provide the foundation for the development and maintenance of a representative bureaucracy (Lewis & Pitts, 2011). Second, we utilize a sample who are not yet employed in the public sector, and who are about to embark on their first careers. Focusing on pre-service individuals can reduce cognitive dissonance, since post-public service socialization could confound an individual’s responses in their sectoral choice (Carpenter et al., 2012; Clerkin & Coggburn, 2012). Building on prior work examining public service attraction among current employees (e.g., Lewis & Frank, 2002), our sample is comprised of millennials attending colleges and universities, who represent the workforce of the future, and are a significant source of hires for managerial jobs in government and the private sector (Ng & Burke, 2006). Third, using a more comprehensive set of predictor variables, we extend the literature on public service attraction by identifying a unique set of work values that are predictive of attraction to employment in the public sector vis-a-vis the private sector. Moreover, we specifically investigate how minority group members may differ in these work values compared to majority group members. Taken together, this research will deepen our knowledge of the key motives underlying public sector attraction, which can in turn, help to inform policy-making and the design of recruitment initiatives that more effectively attract qualified job seekers from various demographic groups.

Method

Sample and Methodology

Data for the present study were collected as a part of a large-scale survey commissioned by a consortium of large Canadian employers to better understand the job, organizational, and career preferences of post-secondary students. Participants were college and university students from across Canada who responded to the web survey administered at the Career Services Office at their college/university. In return for their participation, students were offered an opportunity to enter a draw for various prizes (e.g., iPads). Given our interest in students closest to entering the labor market, only students who were expecting to graduate and to seek their first full-time employment within the next year were included in the study. In total, the sample consisted of 12,873 students. The average age of respondents was 22.5 years. Overall, 59.5% of respondents in the sample were female; 19.2% self-identified as visible minorities; 1.2% Aboriginal; 2.9% persons with disabilities; and 3.1% LGBT.

Measures

*Public Sector Attraction*. Consistent with prior studies (e.g., Lewis & Frank, 2002; Taylor, 2005a, b), attraction to employment in the public sector was measured by asking participants to indicate whether they would prefer employment in the public or private sector. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to the following item: “When considering full-time employment with an organization immediately following graduation, would you prefer to work in a job: (a) in the public sector (i.e., in the government or public service), or (b) in the private sector (i.e., in a private business)”? For the purposes of the data analysis, responses to this item were coded as private sector = 0; public sector =1.

*Work Values*. In reference to their upcoming search for full-time employment, respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance (1 = not at all important, 4 = very important) of 15 job attributes that are well-established in the work values literature (e.g., Houston, 2000; Jurkiewicz, Massey, & Brown, 1998; Lewis & Frank, 2002; Lyons, Duxbury & Higgins, 2006). The job attributes/work values assessed include: “job security”, “commitment to social responsibility”, “good health and benefits plan”, “organization is a leader in its field”, “opportunities for advancement”, “opportunities for a personal impact”, “good people to work with”, “opportunities to travel”, “good initial salary level”, “commitment to employee diversity”, “good people to report to”, “good variety of work”, “interesting work”, “work-life balance”, and “good training opportunities”.

*Demographic Variables*. Lastly, participants were asked to indicate their gender (male = 0, female = 1), and whether they belong to any of the underrepresented groups: visible minority (non-VM = 0, VM = 1), Aboriginal peoples (non-Aboriginal = 0, Aboriginal = 1), persons with disabilities (non-PWD = 0, PWD = 1), and LGBT (non-LGBT = 0, LGBT = 1).

Findings

To investigate whether members of each of the focal demographic groups (i.e., underrepresented groups) may differ in terms of their preference for employment in the public or private sector, a chi-square analysis was conducted. Table 2 reports the Pearson chi-square results and percentage of participants favoring public vs. private sector employment for each of the five demographic groups investigated. As shown in Table 2, overall, 38% of respondents would prefer employment in the public sector relative to the private sector. With respect to results for each of the demographic groups, females were significantly more likely to prefer public sector employment than males (*χ²* (1, 12873) = 658.71, *p* < .001, *phi* = .23). Likewise, Aboriginal peoples (*χ²* (1, 12873) = 8.75, *p* < .01, *phi* = .03), persons with disabilities (*χ²* ( 1, 12873) = 14.97, *p* < .001, *phi* = .04), and LGBT group members (*χ²* ( 1, 12873) = 10.43, *p* < .01, *phi* = .03) were also significantly more likely to be attracted to work in the public sector (vs. private sector) relative to their majority group counterparts. Conversely, results indicated that visible minorities (*χ²* (1, 12873) = 6.44, *p* < .05, *phi* = .02) were significantly more attracted to employment in the private sector (vis-à-vis the public sector) compared to their non-visible minority counterparts. Overall, these findings provide support for the premise that the five demographic groups display appreciable differences with respect to their attraction to employment in the public sector. Interestingly, each of the underrepresented groups studied reported a *higher* level of attraction to public sector (vs. private sector) employment than their majority group counterparts, with the notable exception of visible minorities.

A discriminant analysis was conducted to examine whether certain work values predict respondents’ preferences for employment in the public vs. private sector. Wilks’ lambda was significant (*λ* = .89, *χ²* = 1541.38, *p* < .001), which indicates that the model, including all work values, was able to significantly discriminate among the two employment sectors. Table 3 presents the standardized function coefficients, which suggest that the following five work values contribute most to distinguishing those who are attracted to employment in the public vs. private sector – “job security,” “commitment to social responsibility,” “health and benefits plan,” “organization is a leader in its field,” and “opportunities for advancement.” Overall, the classification results for the discriminant function demonstrate that the model correctly predicts 67.2% of cases reporting a preference for public service and 60.2% of cases reporting a preference for private sector employment. The correlation coefficients in Table 2 indicate the strength of association between each work value and the resultant “public vs. private sector" discriminant function; positive coefficients predict public service while negative coefficients predict private sector employment. In addition to the five work values that yielded the highest standardized function coefficients, “commitment to employee diversity” also emerged as a significant correlate of respondents’ preference for public vs. private sector employment. Thus, the results from the discriminant analysis identify four key work values that significantly predict preference for public sector: “job security,” “commitment to social responsibility,” “health and benefits plan,” “commitment to employee diversity,” and two that identify a preference for private sector employment: “organization is a leader in its field,” and “opportunities for advancement.”

To examine whether the demographic groups differ on these key work values that predict public sector work attraction, a MANOVA was conducted in which the five demographic groups were entered as independent variables and the six work values most strongly associated with public sector attraction were included as dependent variables. Multivariate analyses indicated significant main effects for each of the demographic groups on the work values composite (gender: *F* (6, 12873) = 231.93, *p* < .001; visible minority: *F* (6, 12873) = 157.03, *p* < .001; Aboriginal peoples: *F* (6, 12873) = 3.93, *p* < .001; persons with disabilities: *F* (6, 12873) = 3.59, *p* < .001; LGBT: *F* (6, 12873) = 25.50, *p* < .001). Follow-up ANOVAs (see Table 4) were conducted to examine the pattern of main effects for each demographic variable. As shown in Table 4, two demographic groups exhibited a somewhat consistent pattern of responding across work values. Specifically, visible minorities reported significantly higher ratings on each of the six work values relative to non-visible minorities. Furthermore, women reported significantly higher ratings on four work values compared to men: job security, commitment to social responsibility, health and benefits, and commitment to employee diversity. Echoing this trend, Aboriginal peoples reported higher scores on two work values: social responsibility and commitment to employee diversity. Interestingly, persons with disabilities reported higher ratings of commitment to employee diversity than individuals without disabilities, but lower ratings of opportunities for advancement. Finally, LGBT group members also tended to place a higher value on attributes such as commitment to social responsibility and diversity, but a significantly lower value on work factors as job security, organization is a leader in its field, and opportunities for advancement. Overall, these findings indicate that while each demographic group appears to place a different emphasis on each of the work values, two values emerged as particularly important across each of the underrepresented groups: commitment to social responsibility, and commitment to diversity[[4]](#footnote-4).

Discussion

Given increasing levels of diversity in the workplace and the aim to promote greater representative bureaucracy in Canada, this study examined the question of whether minority group members report an interest in jobs in the public sector. Overall, our findings indicate that 38 percent of the respondents were interested in employment in the public sector. Interestingly, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, women, and LGBT people were each more likely to indicate a preference for work in the public sector than their majority group counterparts (i.e., non-Aboriginal, non-disabled, men, and heterosexuals) while visible minorities were more interested in a private sector career than non-visible minorities. This is cause for some concern since the visible minority group is projected to comprise approximately one-third of the Canadian labor force by 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2011). In order to better understand this overall pattern of sectoral preferences, we now turn to findings regarding the work values that predict sectoral choice.

In line with prior studies examining public sector service career choice and reward preferences (e.g., Houston, 2000; Jurkiewicz et al., 1998; Wittmer, 1991), we found that respondents who value job security and health and benefits were more interested in a career in the public sector. This finding may reflect an implicit belief that the public sector may generally pay less than the private sector but may also offer stronger job security and benefits (cf. Lyons, et al., 2006). Indeed, recent research shows that public sector employees may place a lower emphasis on monetary benefits as a source of satisfaction in their job, and instead may substitute the lower salary with other work preferences such as job security and good working conditions (Ng & Gossett, forthcoming). Interestingly, we also found that individuals who value a commitment to social responsibility tend to be more attracted to public service. In this regard, individuals attracted to the public sector may view work as being more about serving the public and less about gaining a high income and/or prestige, a result echoed in studies reporting that public sector employees tend to highly value intrinsic rewards (e.g., making a contribution to society) relative to extrinsic rewards (e.g., Houston, 2000; Lyons et al., 2006). Conversely, our results indicate that individuals who desire to work in the private sector highly value factors such as working for an industry leader and opportunities for advancement. These findings appear to be consistent with a perception that certain private sector employers may have more specialized, industry-specific expertise and perhaps the financial resources and flexibility needed to offer stronger career advancement opportunities.

Our third research question asked to what extent minority group members share the work values that best predict a career in public service. Interestingly, one key variable that stood out across minority groups is an employer’s commitment to diversity. We found employer commitment to diversity was significantly associated with a preference for public service; moreover, each minority group (i.e., women, visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and LGBT individuals) reported that this variable is a key work value that they consider in their choice of employers. This finding is consistent with prior studies suggesting that ethnic minorities are more attracted to organizations who convey clear recruitment messaging supporting diversity through job advertisements that state this commitment explicitly (Ng & Burke, 2005) or that portray other (racial) minorities in the workplace (Highhouse, Stierwalt, Bachiochi, Elder, & Fisher, 1999). Interestingly, our results indicate that a commitment to diversity is valued not just by ethnic minorities, but each of the underrepresented groups. These groups may view this attribute as highly important as it may signal the quality of an organization’s diversity climate and its willingness to hire, promote, and support the careers of workers in each of these groups.

In terms of our findings regarding the work values of each minority group, results indicated that women value both job security and health and benefits in addition to an employer’s commitment to social responsibility and diversity. This finding is consistent with the career patterns of many women who express a strong desire for greater job security and employment benefits, particularly following maternity (Schweitzer, Ng, Lyons, & Kuron, 2011). Furthermore, a large number of studies have reported that women often place a stronger emphasis on ethical behavior than men (cf. Dalton & Ortegren, 2011), and exhibit attributes such as nurturance and succorance (Williams & Best, 1990), which may lead to a value preference for social responsibility.

With respect to visible minorities, visible minority group members reported an overall preference for private sector careers and for two work values that predict private sector attraction – working for an employer that is a leader in its field and opportunities for advancement. However, it is also notable that visible minorities also scored relatively highly on each of the key work values that predict public sector attraction -- job security, employment benefits, and a commitment to social responsibility and diversity. Many recent immigrants, who are also visible minorities, are focused on socioeconomic mobility (Ng & Sears, 2010) and may therefore emphasize working for an industry leader and gaining advancement opportunities. Although visible minorities also value comparable working conditions to others (Ng & Sears, 2010), the desire for rapid socioeconomic mobility may “crowd out” other aspects of work such as job security, employment benefits, and satisfaction derived from intrinsic aspects of work (Benabou & Tirole, 2006; Mellstrome & Johannesson, 2008). In this regard, since the public sector may generally be seen as limiting their career opportunities, visible minorities may instead opt for private sector careers. This perception may be compounded by the fact that visible minorities who are recent immigrants may have a negative image of the government in general. For example, many visible minorities who are from the third world immigrated to Canada to escape political persecution and government corruption, and thus have little faith and trust in government (Patrias & Frager, 2001; Wayland, 2003). This more skeptical view derived from their previous experiences may contribute to potentially negative perceptions of the desirability of public sector employment.

Aboriginal peoples did not differ significantly from non-Aboriginals with respect to their work values, except for on the dimensions of commitment to diversity and commitment to social responsibility. As Aboriginal peoples face higher unemployment rates than non-Aboriginals in Canada, issues related to livelihood and preservation of culture are central to the Aboriginal community (Kendall, 2001). More recently, issues concerning oil and gas, land claims, and the environment have also dominated the dialogue between Aboriginals and the Canadian government (Fidler, 2010). Therefore it should come as no surprise that social responsibility is a central concern to Aboriginal respondents. Furthermore, Aboriginal peoples may be attracted to public service and policy making to improve the welfare of the Aboriginal community and to extend their right to self-determination.

As with Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities did not differ substantially from non-disabled persons with respect to their work values, except for their values relating to an employer’s commitment to diversity and advancement opportunities. Disabled Canadians may be less likely to emphasize opportunities for advancement because they are more likely to be engaged in temporary work, underemployed, unemployed, or not participate in the labour market altogether (Konrad, Moore, Ng, Doherty, & Breward, in press). Issues of accessibility are often a barrier to employment, and the Government of Canada may be seen as more accessible than the private sector in accommodating workers with disabilities, given its mandate to serve the public and protect the rights of citizens (Atkins, 2006). Alternatively, persons with disabilities may also see career advancement as requiring long work hours and less flexible working conditions, and thus prefer public sector employment (Houston, 2000).

Lastly, LGBT individuals rated commitment to social responsibility and diversity more highly, and job security, leader in the field, and advancement opportunity less highly than heterosexuals, indicating a strong public service orientation. Recent studies (Lewis & Pitts, 2011; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2012) have documented that, as a stigmatized group, LGBT individuals may emphasize political altruism as an important work value in their career choice. The motive behind political altruism is a desire to promote fairness in society and to help others and themselves (Steen 2006, 2008). Political altruism is thus important to LGBT individuals in their efforts to reduce the social stigma associated with being a sexual minority and to enhance their standing in society. Due to concerns over social justice and the role of rational self-interest, LGBT individuals may be more attracted to working in the public service insofar as private sector organizations may not be viewed as offering the same level of recognition of social issues or the same platform for political altruism.

Conclusion

In summary, our findings signal that, with the notable exception of visible minorities, each of the underrepresented groups report a discernibly stronger preference for work in the public sector (vs. private sector) compared to the majority group; however, the motives underlying this attraction to public sector jobs tended to vary for each demographic group. For example, Aboriginal peoples and LGBT group members appear to emphasize an employer’s commitment to social responsibility and diversity in their choice of employers, perhaps partly owing to a greater interest in political altruism, the appeal of potentially influencing and enacting social policy, and the desire to work in a climate that actively supports diversity. Likewise, women perceive an employer’s commitment to social responsibility and diversity as desirable attributes, but also view factors such as job security and health and benefits as key attributes that attract them to jobs in the public sector. Regardless of the minority group, however, a common attribute that appears to be valued by all minority groups is an employer’s commitment to diversity. This finding suggests that this attribute may be a key source of competitive advantage that may attract individuals from diverse backgrounds to work in the public sector.

It is interesting to note that visible minorities tend to report lower levels of public sector attraction overall. This appears to be partly attributable to a generally negative perception of government jobs and an inherent belief that the private sector offers greater socioeconomic mobility. By the same token, however, it is important to point out that visible minorities scored higher on the four key work values that are positively associated with public sector attraction (i.e., job security, health and benefits, commitment to social responsibility, commitment to diversity). Overall, these findings signal that public sector employers may be able to enhance their effectiveness in recruiting visible minorities by further highlighting these positive features of public sector jobs in their recruitment efforts and messaging. Moreover, our results indicate that public sector employers should also take more deliberate steps to improve the image of the public sector and the perception that public sector jobs offer more limited opportunities for socioeconomic mobility (i.e., opportunities for advancement, or to work for highly reputable, industry leaders). In the coming years, the Canadian government will need to differentiate itself from private sector employers to appeal to a diverse pool of talent, and to achieve its aim for representative bureaucracy. This study provides an initial portrait of key motives that drive attraction to the public and private sector, which can be used to better design recruitment efforts and tailor these initiatives to appeal to the core values of workers from diverse backgrounds.

We close by cautioning the reader that the sample in this study was comprised of Canadian students who are about to embark on their first careers. Thus, one must be cautious in generalizing findings from this study to other cultures and countries. Nevertheless, the findings do represent the views, values, and career choices of the next generation of workers in Canada, including for each of the underrepresented groups. We encourage future studies in this area to be conducted across different cultures and national contexts to further test the generalizability of these findings and to further explore the diverse range of motives that underlie workers’ sectoral preferences. Research adopting a mixed-method approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies, will be particularly valuable in further disentangling the core motives underlying public sector attraction among different minority groups.

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**Table 2: Chi-square Comparisons: Preference for Public vs. Private Sector**

**Employment by each Demographic Group**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Want to work for*  *the Public Sector* | *Want to work for*  *the Private Sector* | *N* |
| Gender |  |  |  |
| Male | 25.3% | 74.7% | 5210 |
| Female | 47.7% | 52.3% | 7663 |
| χ² | 658.71\*\*\* |  |  |
| Visible Minority (VM) |  |  |  |
| VM | 36.4% | 63.6% | 2471 |
| Non-VM | 39.1% | 60.9% | 10402 |
| χ² | 6.44\* |  |  |
| Aboriginal Peoples |  |  |  |
| Aboriginal | 50.0% | 50.0% | 158 |
| Non-Aboriginal | 38.5% | 61.5% | 12715 |
| χ² | 8.75\*\* |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Persons with Disabilities (PWD) |  |  |  |
| PWD | 50.0% | 50.0% | 268 |
| Non-PWD | 38.4% | 61.6% | 12605 |
| χ² | 14.97\*\*\* |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| LGBT |  |  |  |
| LGBT | 46.4% | 53.6% | 399 |
| Non-LGBT | 38.4% | 61.6% | 12474 |
| χ² | 10.43\*\* |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| TOTAL | 38.0% | 62.0% | 12873 |

*\*\*\*p<.001, \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05*

**Table 3: Results of Discriminant Analysis: Standardized Function and**

**Correlation Coefficients**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Work Values* | *Standard. Function Coefficient* | *r* |
| Job security | .47 | .51 |
| Commitment to social responsibility | .43 | .50 |
| Good health and benefits plan | .42 | .49 |
| Organization is a leader in its field | -.40 | -.26 |
| Opportunities for advancement | -.32 | -.26 |
| Opportunities for a personal impact | .23 | .22 |
| Good people to work with | -.22 | -.03 |
| Opportunities to travel | -.20 | -.22 |
| Good initial salary level | -.16 | -.06 |
| Commitment to employee diversity | .13 | .30 |
| Good people to report to | -.12 | -.01 |
| Good variety of work | -.09 | -.04 |
| Interesting work | .05 | .02 |
| Work-life balance | -.02 | .22 |
| Good training opportunities | .01 | .03 |

**Table 4: Univariate Effects of Demographic Variables on Work Values associated with Attraction to**

**Employment in the Public vs. Private Sector**

|  |
| --- |
| *Job Security Social Respons. Health & Benefits Diversity Leader in Field Opp. Advancement* |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Mean* | *s.d.* | *Mean* | *s.d.* | *Mean* | *s.d.* | *Mean* | *s.d.* | *Mean* | *s.d* | *Mean* | *s.d.* |
| Gender |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Male | 3.28\*\*\* | .75 | 3.06\*\*\* | .87 | 3.19\*\*\* | .77 | 2.97\*\*\* | .96 | 2.91 | .81 | 3.24 | .72 |
| Female | 3.52\*\*\* | .64 | 3.35\*\*\* | .74 | 3.46\*\*\* | .68 | 3.30\*\*\* | .86 | 2.90 | .77 | 3.22 | .71 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Visible Minority |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| VM | 3.46\*\*\* | .68 | 3.24\*\*\* | .81 | 3.36\*\*\* | .71 | 3.38\*\*\* | .82 | 3.00\*\*\* | .75 | 3.32\*\*\* | .66 |
| Non-VM | 3.35\*\*\* | .70 | 3.16\*\*\* | .81 | 3.29\*\*\* | .73 | 2.90\*\*\* | .91 | 2.81\*\*\* | .79 | 3.14\*\*\* | .72 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Aborig. Peoples |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Aboriginal | 3.43 | .69 | 3.27\*\* | .73 | 3.34 | .72 | 3.25\*\*\* | .91 | 2.91 | .83 | 3.19 | .75 |
| Non-Aboriginal | 3.37 | .70 | 3.13\*\* | .81 | 3.31 | .73 | 3.02\*\*\* | .91 | 2.90 | .78 | 3.27 | .71 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Persons with Disabilities |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| PWD | 3.41 | .73 | 3.22 | .84 | 3.36 | .75 | 3.19\* | .95 | 2.87 | .85 | 3.18\* | .81 |
| Non-PWD | 3.40 | .69 | 3.19 | .81 | 3.29 | .72 | 3.08\* | .91 | 2.94 | .78 | 3.28\* | .71 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LGBT |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LGBT | 3.34\*\*\* | .76 | 3.28\*\*\* | .77 | 3.31 | .72 | 3.26\*\*\* | .91 | 2.83\*\*\* | .83 | 3.15\*\*\* | .80 |
| Non-LGBT | 3.46\*\*\* | .69 | 3.12\*\*\* | .81 | 3.34 | .73 | 3.01\*\*\* | .91 | 2.98\*\*\* | .78 | 3.31\*\*\* | .71 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

*\*\*\*p<.001, \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05*

1. “Visible minorities” is the term used in Canada to refer to racial or ethnic minorities. It includes anyone who is non-Caucasian in race and non-White in color. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In addition to increasing diversity to enhance competitiveness (Cox & Blake, 1991), federally regulated private sector employers are also actively recruiting workers from underrepresented groups to comply with requirements of the Employment Equity Act. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In *Egan v. Canada* [1995], the Supreme Court of Canada established that sexual orientation constitutes a prohibited basis of discrimination under Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Persons with disabilities were the only underrepresented group who did not report a higher rating on commitment to social responsibility than the comparison (majority) group. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)